



TESTIMONY BY MAYOR MARCIA LECLERC, TOWN OF EAST HARTFORD
March 4, 2016

HB 5480, An Act Concerning the Application of Liens Resulting from Unpaid Blight Fines, the
Establishment of a Loan Fund to Remediate Blighted Properties

My name is Marcia Leclerc, I am the Mayor of East Hartford, and a member of CCM. I am here to testify in support of HB 5480.

HB 5480, “An Act Concerning the Application of Liens Resulting from Unpaid Blight Fines, the Establishment of a Loan Fund to Remediate Blighted Properties, the Establishment of a Task Force to Study Hoarding and the Maintenance of Properties in Foreclosure”
CCM supports HB 5480.

The bill is a comprehensive proposal to assist towns and cities combat and prevent blight by (1) allowing municipalities to place liens on any properties throughout the state owned by a person who has unpaid fines due to the violation of a local blight ordinance; (2) creating a Housing Revitalization Fund to enable residential homeowners to make eligible repairs to remediate and or prevent the occurrence of blight; (3) creating a Task Force to study the issue and prevention of hoarding; and (4) require a foreclosing party to maintain properties throughout the foreclosure process.

Blight is a serious issue that effecting every town and city. It has a detrimental impact on local property values, requires the use of scarce municipal resources, creates a public safety hazard, increases liability exposure and discourages development and economic growth. There are many factors that lead to the occurrence of blight, and as, such there is not a single solution to address it. Rather, what is needed, and provided by HB 5480, is a comprehensive approach that seeks to prevent blight, remediate blight, and allow for greater authority to enforce local blight ordinances and collect fines levied on blighted

Municipalities can and do enact local blight ordinances and utilize these to impose fines as a means of compelling the owner of property to maintain it to a standard determined by the town or city. In our urban areas, many of these blighted properties are rental units, owned by “absentee landlords” who are unwilling to pay fines, and subsequent liens that have been levied.

The ability of municipalities to impose liens on additional properties, owned by the same landowner or LLC, when existing fines remain unpaid, would provide additional leverage for towns and cities to more efficiently collect fines and enforce existing blight ordinances.

Housing Revitalization Loan Fund

In addition to the enforcement of blight ordinances and codes, HB 5480 creates a Housing Revitalization Loan Fund that will assist residential homeowners prevent or remediate blight. The ability to make minor repairs can go a long towards the prevention of blight. The painting of a house, replacing broken windows or fixing a porch will not only improve the value of that property, but can help maintain the

property values for other residents. It would improve the aesthetics of neighborhood and maintain and improve a higher quality of life.

Residents want to maintain their homes, but in these difficult economic times, finding the money to repaint a house or conduct needed repairs is difficult. These repairs, which may be minor, when left unaddressed become larger, more expensive and are soon completely beyond the means of many homeowners to address. The loan fund proposed by this bill would provide a mechanism that homeowners can utilize to maintain their property and improve the quality of life in their communities.

Foreclosing Parties

The bill would also amend current statute and require a foreclosing party to ensure that properties subject to foreclosure are maintained throughout the proceedings. Current law requires a foreclosing party to register the address of any property in foreclosure and list a local property maintenance company that is responsible for the property, but there is no obligation to maintain or secure these properties.

This often can led to properties in the foreclosure process to become blighted. When a property is not maintained, it can be identified as unoccupied and become subject to vandalism that may result in damages that reach into the tens of thousands of dollars, making the property unattractive to potential buyers and allowing it to remain blighted and unoccupied for long periods of times, to the detriment of neighboring homeowners.

A foreclosing party should have the obligation to maintain these properties, just as a homeowner, landlord or business has the duty to maintain their properties. Simple maintenance measures such as mowing the lawn, and ensuring the property is secured can prevent these properties from becoming blighted.

Hoarding Task Force

HB 5480 would establish a task force to study the issues associated with hoarding. In particular, the task force would review current methods to address hoarding, identify barriers faced by public agencies to intervene and assist persons who do hoard, and create a framework to coordinate the efforts among state and local officials to address the public safety and health issues associated with hoarding.

CCM appreciates representation on the Task Force. Local officials realize the sensitive, yet important response that is needed to assist individuals who hoard. In addition, it would be valuable to develop a response and coordinate effort to assist public safety and health officials eliminate address safety concerns.

The prevention and remediation of blight as a priority for every town and city. HB 5480 would improve the quality of life, maintain local communities and benefit all of our shared constituents.

Myself and CCM urges the Committee to support HB 5480.

Sincerely,



Marcia A. Leclerc

Mayor

Town of East Hartford